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## Michigan Youth Are Taking Fewer Risks

The Michigan Department of Community Health and the Michigan Department of Education today announced the percentage of young people engaging in many of the serious risk behaviors is statistically down from 1997 and 1999, according to results from the 2001 Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

The Michigan YRBS is part of a nationwide surveying effort led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor students' health risks and behaviors.

Significantly fewer teens are smoking, drinking, carrying weapons, initiating sex at an early age, and getting pregnant. Other positive trends include improved seatbelt and bike helmet use. No trends in the reverse direction were noted.

"These results clearly indicate that prevention education in our schools works because we have seen a sustained reduction in these behaviors in young people over time," said Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins. "We are very encouraged by these results and view them as an important step toward improving academic achievement and reducing absenteeism."

"We are extremely pleased to see these positive results," said James K. Haveman, Jr., Director of the Michigan Department of Community Health. "The fact that more and more high school students are making the effort to be healthy and avoid violence and risky behaviors is great news for the citizens of Michigan."

3,630 students in 43 public high schools in Michigan completed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey during the spring of 2001. The high response rates (school 88%, student 83%), allow results to be generalized to all Michigan students in grades 9-12.

The survey includes questions that address those behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and illness in young people and adults. The 2001 Michigan survey included 99 questions covering behaviors grouped by the CDC into six general health risk areas: 1) intentional and unintentional injury; 2) tobacco use; 3) alcohol and other drug use; 4) sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy or disease; 5) dietary behaviors; and 6) physical inactivity.

Michigan is one of only a handful of states with high enough response rates on three consecutive YRBS survey administrations (1997, 1999 and 2001) to have scientific trend data.

These results are very heartening, and support Michigan's school health education efforts to help curb these risk behaviors. During the past five years, Michigan has developed and disseminated middle school and high school curricula that address smoking, alcohol use, violence, HIV, nutrition, and physical activity.

Michigan is the only state in the country with a state-developed model curriculum in health education for elementary, middle, and high school students. The Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education addresses these vital health issues in successive grades, and provides students with essential knowledge and prevention skills to avoid risky behaviors and improve health. More than 90 percent of Michigan districts use the Michigan Model for Comprehensive Health Education.

"Michigan has been sustaining health education, and as a result, these statistics have continued to decline," Watkins said. "The bottom line, when analyzing these results, is that healthy students have a greater capacity to learn and are ultimately more successful in school and life."

Health education messages taught in the classroom are most effective when reinforced throughout the school and at home. This is true for issues ranging from conflict resolution to healthy eating to staying physically active.

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